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THE IDYLL OF LUCINDA PEARL

A POEM BY ROBERT BOGGS



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So they went into the misty moonlight.

THE IDYLL OF LUCINDA PEARL

A POEM & BY ROBERT BOGGS

*ILLUSTRATED IN COLOR
BY THE AUTHOR*



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By

ROBERT BOGGS



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DEDICATION

*In memory of her who left us to dwell where none may
enter save the pure and holy.*

*For her a better life than this,
A life of everlasting bliss,
Where joys celestial never cease;
Where God the noble landscape paints,
And angels walk and blessed saints,
In love and peace.*

*Oh, wretched world! Oh, broken hearts!
That still must live and play their parts,
Though sorrows weigh them down,
Must bear their cross without complaint,
And falter not, nor doubting faint,
If they would wear the crown.*

*We live to die—we die to live.
Ah! why do we with mourning grieve
For them who early reach the goal,
Who pass us on the heavenward road,
And find, with joy, that blest abode,
Home of the deathless soul?*



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THE IDYLL OF LUCINDA PEARL.

The spacious building square and ugly stood;
Within its walls no living creature stirred:
Where late a busy throng had plied their craft,
Content with toil to win their daily bread,
Unwonted silence reigned. All work had ceased,
And they, the workers, must in patience wait
The master's will: in patience wait, dear Lord.
No work, no bread,—thus man hath fixed the law,
Though bread enough there is for all and more.

A slender girl was gazing wistfully,
With dark, sad eyes upon the silent place,
Clutching a scant, thin shawl with nervous hand,
And drawing it about her narrow chest;
For 'twas a bleak and drear November day,
And gusty winds came swooping from the North,
Making her shrink and shiver. Ah, 'twas cold.
There was rare beauty in the pensive face,
Albeit pinched and wan; the great brown eyes
Were full of light that shining on a man
Would touch his soul, were it not steeped in vice,
And stir his pity.

Half a mile away
From that brick pile arose a mansion fair,
On every side begirt with well-kept grounds,
Where trees and shrubs now blazed with all the tints
That gorgeous autumn lays with lavish hand.
It was a place of wonder to the mind

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Of this sad child of poverty,—a home
Where gods might dwell. 'Twas here the master
lived.

Forth from this mansion fared a handsome youth,
Perfumed, and clothed in fashion's newest garb:
One moment gazed he at the cold, gray sky,
And sauntered down the winding avenue
To the great gate that opened on the road:
There he walked on, and turned his listless steps
Toward the factory grim; and here arrived
He saw the girl and looked into her face—
As one will look at one he meets by chance—
And was surprised to see the lovely eyes,
The soft brown eyes, the finely chiselled nose
And mouth and chin, the forehead smooth and fair,
The hair abundant, caught in silken folds
Behind the head. This dainty dawdling youth
Was struck with wonder that in humble guise
Such beauty he beheld. He stopped and stood,
Looking upon her with admiring gaze,
Then nearer drew. "You are distress'd," he said;
"What is't that troubles you? Can I advise,
Or help?"

"Ah, sir," she answered—startled, she
Had not perceived him till his voice had drawn
Her eyes to his—"you are the master's son,
And you should know how long these days must
last,—

These idle days, I mean. To us, the poor,
Long idleness is death."

"Oh, no, not that;
Not quite so bad, methinks," he smiling said.
"Alas! good sir, you scarce can know how hard
It is for us to live, e'en when we toil."

"I fancy, pretty one, there's little need
That you, at least, should labor like a slave,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Though there are those who must. You were not
made

Of such coarse stuff as they with whom you dwell.
Your life should be a life of pleasant ease,
Without a care to fill those eyes with tears,—
Such lovely eyes on no unlovely thing
Should ever look.”

“Ah me!” she sighed, while he
Thus tempted her to sin—not knowing she
Was being tempted—“not for such as I
Is this sweet life of ease of which you tell.
We poor ones all must work—or beg or steal;
And work is best when work there is to do.
But when there is no work——”

“What then?”

“We live

As best we can upon the dole we get
From those who know our needs; it is not much,
But all they can afford.”

“Your lot is hard”

(With sympathetic tone). “To me it seems
’Twere better far to die at once and thus
Have done with life like this. But why live on
In such a whirl of turmoil, dust, and grime?
E’en though with toil you earn enough to keep
The hunger-wolf at bay?”

“And how, good sir,
Can I, a simple girl and poor, do else?
For this, the only work that I have learned,
Is all that I can do to earn my bread.”

“Have you no ties—I mean of kindred?”

“None;

I am alone—perhaps ’tis better so——”

“Aye, better so.”

“Though often I have wished
There was a mother or a sister dear

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

For me as for the rest,—someone to love.
There is a craving at the heart betimes,
A kind of hunger, as of something starved,
A strange, dark void that makes me sad and sick.
You understand, sir, I am sure you do.”
“I understand,” he answered with a smile.
“Your solitary state oft weighs you down;
For they with whom you dwell can ne’er be aught
Than what they are, a coarse and common herd.
Your sympathies turn not to them, and they
Are dead to all those softer sentiments
With which your heart, o’erburdened, longs to find
Another heart as full to rest upon.”
He spoke with grace, and she gave willing ear
To all he said. His words flowed softly smooth
As meadow brook; and he seemed well to know
What she, in inmost self, had often felt.
“There is a way,” he said, “by which you may
Behind you leave this sordid, toilsome life.”
Then looked she with a hopeful gaze, while he
With chosen words a tempting picture drew.
“On a fair river’s sloping bank,” he said,
“There stands a cot half hidden by the vines
And trees that spread their branches o’er its roof;
And there’s a garden, where in season bloom
Fair roses, asters, sweet clove-pinks, and all
The fragrant children of the effulgent sun;
Where Amaryllis lifts her gorgeous crown,
And gracious Lily bends her spotless brow
O’er beds of violets that seek to hide
Their dainty heads. It is a quiet spot
Where love may dally, feeding on itself,
As long as life shall last. Here, if you choose,
Shall be your home, and here you may find rest
In happy idleness, secure from care.”
“My home, sir?”

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

"Aye, your home so long as you shall please to call it so." Her gentle heart had warmed with strange delight, while yet he drew the picture to her fancy. But when now he bade her choose this place for her abode, as if he were a fairy prince to give, her eyelids drooped—a sigh escaped her lips; for the first time she thought his words untrue. "You mock me, sir," she said, and turned away. "Nay, nay," he cried, and seized her thin, white hand;

I mock you not, you simple, foolish child.
The cot is mine to give to whom I will.
Come there with me—'tis scarce an hour's walk—
And be its mistress—fairer could not be—
No more to know what 'tis to want, but feast
On dainties rare, and go attired in silks,
With gems and laces such as ladies wear."
She looked upon the ground and slowly drew
Her hand from his. She saw not that his eyes
Were all aflame with passionate desire,
But something seemed to teach her innocence
That this which he would have could not be right.
"You answer not," he said, "shall it be so?
Or do you still prefer the wretched lot
That Fate to you unfairly hath assigned?"
"I scarcely understand, sir," she replied,
"How I, a foolish, untaught girl, can go
To such a place as this of which you tell,
And be its mistress. Surely 'twould be strange
For me, who always have been poor, to be
So sudden rich."

"But that you'll understand
When you are there. Ah! say it shall be so!"
"I'll think upon it, sir, and answer you
Another time."

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

"But why not answer now?"

'Twere surely little difficult to choose
Between the two,—a life of toil and care
And one of plenteous ease."

"But I must think.

I may seem thankless—but you must excuse
The seeming, sir,—I am not so indeed."

"Ah, well, as you desire, so let it be.

To-morrow I will seek you here again—
Suffice a day to set your mind at rest—
And you can give me then your yea or nay."

And so he left her, humming as he went

A little air that she had often heard.

The words to fit it told of maiden fair

Who died for love of one who false had proved.

"Oh, yea, or nay," she murmured, "they would seem
Two easy words to choose between—and yet
They are not so at all times."

While she mused

Thus to herself, an aged man drew near,

And stood before her, leaning on his cane—

An oaken staff of goodly size and rough.

He shook his head and looked upon her face—

Her sad, sweet face—with gentle, pitying eye.

"Poor child," he said, "you find it hard to choose

Betwixt the yea and nay. Perchance it is,

For one so young, who knoweth not the ways

Of this unrighteous world; but let me say—

And heed well what I say—when there's a doubt,

Then nay's the word, and let the word be nay,

And never falter. 'Tis a pleasant thing

To answer yea, but duty has its claims,

And nay's the word of duty; mind you that."

The girl gazed at him wondering while he talked,

Shaking his grizzly head, and with his staff

Striking the ground to emphasize his words.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

She was perplexed. And he, continuing, said:
"Like a weak child set in a field of flax,
You dare not stir for fear that you may trip.
But come, I'll set you right, if in the right
You have a mind to go."

"Ah, sir," she said,
"'Tis what I most desire, and you should know
The path that leads aright."

"Aye, well I know
That there are pits in which a heedless girl
May fall, and having fallen ne'er come out
The same pure creature that she was before.
And there are those would lead her all astray;
Like yonder youth, with his soft, winning ways,
Who promised you so fair. Did never hear
Of crafty spider and a silly fly?"
"I've heard the tale."

"Well, he the spider is,
The place he told you of his den; and you
The fly he would entrap. You understand?"
"I am not sure, sir, that I do," she said;
"I am most ignorant, and cannot guess
The meaning of it all. He seemed sincere,
And offered me so much—who nothing have."
The old man stared at her, and shook his head.
"Oh, child," he said, "how have you lived so long
In place like this, and kept so free from guile?"
She understood him not; and more perplexed,
Looked questioning into his age-dimmed eyes
With glance so clear and frank that none might doubt
The faith and purity of that fair mind,
Where never thought unclean had entered yet.
"Ah, 'twere a pity," said this honest man,
"That such a snow-white lamb should long abide
Where wanton wolves go prowling, seeking prey;
Her very innocence will prove her rue."

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

She knows not how to guard it, knowing not
It is endangered. Poor, weak child,"—to her—
"You are beset with many perils here
You know not of."

"What may they be?" she asked;
"Here have I always lived, and found no harm.
I've earned my bread, save when there was no work;
And then kind people have supplied my need,—
At least they've done the best they could for me.
As for the rest."

The old man seemed in doubt,
Then said, "You are too simple, little one,
But I will not unfold a shameful truth,
Which, for a time at least, may hidden lie
From one so pure, without the fear of ill;
And gladly I will shield you, if I may,
Protect your maiden innocence from loss
By wicked wiles of them who hold it cheap.
I am a farmer, as you may perceive—
My garb is not the garb of city men—
A man who wrestles with his mother earth,
To win from her an honest livelihood.
My home is plain, but there is comfort there,
And peace and plenty. Nancy, my good wife,
And daughter Cinthy, nigh about your age,
And Silas, too, our son—a stalwart lad
As ever handled tool or backed a horse.
We are but four—so room to spare, you see.
Now, will you come to us? You are alone,
No kith nor kin to hinder—yes, I heard
All that you said to yonder pretty boy—
We'll give you hearty welcome, never doubt,
And you can serve to pay for what you have.
I know my Nancy will be well content,
And Cinthy just delighted; for the girl
Is sometimes lonely: I have heard her wish

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

She had a sister,—one with whom to share
Her homely joys—her griefs. Tut, tut! they are
Too few to count. Now you can be to her
The same as sister—she the same to you—
And we will treat you just as though you were.”
The girl looked in his face with hopeful eyes.
Through all the furrows that the plow of time
Had turned up on its surface, she could see
There was a deep, rich loam of honesty,
And thorough, heart-meant kindness beneath.
“I’ll go,” she said, and put her slim, pale hand
In his rough palm where, like a fragile shell
Lodged on a brown and rugged rock, it lay.

II.

“An honest man’s the noblest work of God.”
A faithful woman is his fitting mate;
And such a woman Nancy Ramsay was,—
An earnest partner and a loving wife.
The household that she ruled was ordered well;
Whate’er she did was best done, all agreed,
And rugged John called her the hearthstone’s queen:
For him the field—the land was his domain,—
With nursing it he learned to know its moods,—
But with the housewifery he meddled not.
The little ins and outs,—the mysteries
Of home economy and household thrift
The good wife knew, for she had studied that.
A faithful Christian as a faithful wife,
Her heart was warm with humble charity.
No poor wayfarer passed her lintel by
Ahungered and athirst; and when she gave
She gave with kindly words which ever made
The poorest feel that what he there received

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Was as a fellow-pilgrim in the way.
To this good woman Ramsay took his waif.
"Mother," he said, "here's one I found astray,
Walking alone when most she needs a guide,—
And none more fit to guide than you I know.
Lucinda Pearl, she tells me, is her name,—
Perchance she'll prove a pearl of goodly price.
I found her pure amid impurity,
Clean where uncleanness doth too much prevail."
Then Nancy Ramsay pulled her round-eyed specs
Down from her high, sleek forehead to her nose,
And took a look at sweet Lucinda Pearl.
After a short survey she seemed content,
And laid her hand upon the soft, brown hair,
Smoothing it back: "You're welcome child," she said;
While John stood by, and smiled approvingly
To see her kiss the nervous, trembling lips.
It was the first kiss that the friendless girl
Had e'er received, and through her throbbing heart
It sent a thrill; while to the drooping eyes
It brought a gush of tears, which breaking bounds,
Rolled softly down the thin, wan cheeks, and fell
Upon her hands. "Come, come, my little Pearl,"
The old man said, and gently stroked her head;
"You must not cry, there's naught to make you
grieve."
"Oh, sir," Lucinda answered, "'tis not grief
That makes me cry,—I know not what it is,
But something here" (her hand upon her breast)
"Seemed all at once to fill and overflow."
"Poor little heart," then Nancy said, and kissed
The grateful lips once more; "'tis starved for love!
Poor little heart, to live so long alone,
Without a soul to love in all this world."
And then she took the slender hand in hers,
And led the girl out on the grassy lawn—

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Where noisy fowl, with cluck and cackle loud,
Ran hither, thither, hunting insect prey—
Across the lawn to where the dairy stood,
With a rosy blue-eyed maid among the pans
Of pure white milk and bowls of yellow cream.

"Look, Cinthy," said the mother, "here is one
That father brought to keep you company."

Then Cinthy kissed Lucinda on the cheek,
And told her she was glad that she had come,
And asked her name, and chattered as a girl
Can always chatter to another girl.

"Can you churn?" she asked.

"I'll try," Lucinda said;

But made such bungling work when she did try
That Cinthy laughed, and then Lucinda laughed
For company; and so the two were friends.

Soon Silas came to crave a cooling draught
Of buttermilk, for he had been at work

And was athirst; but seeing this slim girl,
He stood in awkward silence. Silas was

But country bred, and any stranger lass
Could scare him more than could a catamount.

"Well, Silas," said the mistress of the churn,

"What aileth you? You'll surely have a fit.

Here, sit down, foolish boy. Lucinda Pearl—

That's she—and I will bathe your silly head,
And give you buttermilk to make you well."

Then Silas made a clumsy sort of bow

To the big, brown butter-jar, it seemed, but which
Lucinda took unto herself, and dropped

A courtes'y quaint, that made the poor lad turn
A brickdust kind of red; and Cinthy laughed:

"Oh, fie," she said, "don't be so stupid, Si;

Lucinda will not bite you—will you, dear?"

"Oh, no," Lucinda said, and laughing blushed;

When, plucking courage, Si laughed most of all.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

III.

As time flew by, Lucinda rosy grew;
The country air was healthful, and her soul
Was full of peace. She oft would sit and think
Of those long, dreary days of factory work,
Of pale-faced girls who once beside her toiled,—
And who must still toil on without a hope,
Save just to earn their daily meed of food,—
And then her heart grew sad for them, poor souls.
Away from life so dull and colorless
She longed to lead them to the blooming fields,
And 'neath the trees, whose ever-stirring leaves
Let glancing sun-rays fall like golden rain
Upon the new-sprung grass,—for Spring had burst
The frosty fetters of the ice-crowned king,
And brooks and rivulets from thralldom freed—
Resumed their pilgrimage to Neptune's realm,
Making the dead earth live and laugh again,
Clothing her naked limbs in robes of green,
With broid'ry bedight by Flora's cunning hand.

Now, all were busy on John Ramsay's farm,
And little time had any there to dream;
Yet Silas, as he walked behind his plow,
Thought of Lucinda and her sweet, brown eyes;
And when his task was done, 'twas plain to see
How oft his wayward fancy thus had strayed,—
A crooked furrow was the certain sign.
And times he grew quite angry with himself,
For almost every furrow seemed to bend
This way or that, and looking at his work

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

He'd shake his head and say: "It is a shame!
If I can't drive a plow, what can I do?
'Tis not the horse's fault—oh, no; not his;
He better understands his work than I,
His guide and master." Silas never dreamed
Lucinda Pearl had those wild furrows run,
But blamed himself, and wondered how it was
His head and hand less steady had become.
Ah, me the girl had run a furrow deep—
A straight one, too—right through his rustic heart,
Upturning to the light of love's warm sun
The virgin soil. But he, in truth, as yet
Was but half-conscious of the mystery
Within him wrought. He only felt that she
Was something beautiful to look upon,—
A fair, pure girl—a gentle, tender soul,
Whose presence ever gave him fresh delight.

And what thought she of this tall, stalwart youth?
Can human wisdom analyze the change
Unfolded in a modest maiden's breast
When love in all its wondrous beauty blooms,
Filling the world with fragrance and with light
For the sweet soul that wakes to brighter dawn?
Lucinda knew not how or when this change
Had come to her,—she only felt that life
Held something sweeter than it held before.
The sky, the trees, the river running near,
Possessed new charms: the hills, the dales, the flow-
ers,
The grass, the shrubs, and e'en the common weeds,
Seemed clothed in some fresh beauty, which she felt,
As 'twere, a riddle that she could not read.
The evening hum of myriad insects fell
Upon her ear and gave her strange delight;
And in the early morn the songs of birds

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Filled her with rapture. All day long she walked
As in a dream—a still, sweet dream that seemed
A silent undercurrent gliding through
Her common life.

At last there came a time
When Silas knew that life to him would be
A dreary blank without Lucinda Pearl.
And then he never rested till he told
To her the secret that he thought none knew.
'Twas on a summer's eve: the two had strayed
Along the winding path to see the moon
Lift her white face above the dusky hills,
And cast her glance along the river's run,—
A slender mist hung brooding o'er the stream,
And spread itself abroad, with hovering wings
Shielding the drowsing landscape from the glare
Of Dian's full-orbed gaze; and tree and rock
And all the rolling hills afar and near,
Looked like a spectral world.

The maid stood still
While Silas told, in plain and earnest words,
How dear she had become to him, and how
Life's burden would be overmuch to bear
Unless with him she would its blessings share;
His was an humble life, but love uplifts
The poorest creature from its low estate,—
And he would love her always—always hold
Her dearest of all treasures God could give.
“Oh, Silas,” said the girl; and then she paused,
And trembling like a flower in the wind,
Before him stood.

“Lucinda,” cried the youth,
“Speak not the word that parts us,—no, not that;
My heart so full of love would surely break,
If you should say to me you love me not.”
“Ah, no,” she said, and laid her hand in his;

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

"It is not that,—I could not say you nay;
But there is something I to you must tell
Before you give your love to one who may
Perchance unworthy be. I never knew
What 'twas they meant, except to mock at me,
But yonder where I worked, they called me oft
A stray—a child of love,—what that may mean
I do not comprehend, yet this I think—
'Tis something to my shame, and if it be——"
But ere another word could 'scape her lips,
He seized her in his arms and held her close,
Until her heart-throbs mingled with his own;
And kissed her, pouring out a flood of love
In incoherent speech—a torrent wild
Almost to madness, which to her did seem
To catch her spirit up and bear it on
With mighty force that she could not withstand.
"What's that to you or me?" he cried at last,
Panting with passion; "can another's sin
Taint the pure soul of one who knows not sin?
If that be all—nay, not a word, my love"—
He pressed his lips to hers when she would speak—
"There is no reason why you should withhold
From me the love I claim—'tis all I ask—
Your love, Lucinda, dear, your love, your love;
Give me but that, and I will laugh at aught
The envious world may say: deny it me,
And you shall see a man's strong manhood die."
"What can I do?" the trembling maiden said;
"I love you, yes, my very heart and soul
Are full of love for you—nor do I blush
To tell you so—why should I? Is it wrong?
I only fear—I know not what I fear!
Oh, Silas, tell me, that which I was called,—
Is it a thing to shame me, and through me
Shame him I love?"

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

"No, No; dear, one, 'tis not.
'Tis only shame to them who cast it up
'Gainst one so pure in heart and innocent."
"Ah, then, I am content; but were it so,
Sooner my heart should wither in its youth
Than you through love of me should suffer shame."
"Fear not," he said, "with you I'd face the world,
And scorn for scorn I'd give, though you to me
Had come from deepest depths of infamy.
But this is foolish talk: you are too pure
To guess its meaning. See, the misty moon
Makes fairy-land for us to wander in.
Come, love, you are my own, and I am yours,
No earthly power shall part us."

So they went
Into the misty moonlight,—two dim forms
So closely knit that they did seem as one.

IV.

About three miles away as ran the stream,
A little church stood on a tree-topped hill—
A modest building with a small pretence
Of steeple to 't—a tower big enough
To hold the bell, whose voice of music sent
Its sacred message through the valleys still
For miles around, and told the dwellers there
The Lord was waiting for their prayers and praise.
To this small temple, raised by humble hands
To Him who rules the destinies of worlds,
The Ramsays went each pleasant Sabbath morn,
To join the faithful flock that gathered there
To worship Him, the loving one, who made
The greatest and the least, all things to serve
His own mysterious ends, not asking what

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Those ends might be, but fully trusting Him,
Believing that He who could so wisely make
Can rightly rule; and there they'd sit and hear
The good old parson say his little say
About those things that are beyond our ken,
Concerning which the wisest knoweth naught:
He did his best, and that is all that needs.
Then would they sing; and Cinthy's beau would hold
Her book for her—for Cinthy had a "beau,"
Who always sang in so profound a bass
It made the windows shake. And when they prayed,
'Twas earnest prayer from simple, contrite hearts,
That went up from that temple on the hill
To Him who sitteth on the throne of grace.
The service over, all would gather out
Beneath the rustling trees and softly talk,—
The elders, of the weather and the crops;
The younger folk, of just such pleasant things
As younger folk, wherever shines the sun,
Are wont to make the subjects of discourse.
The patient horses nodded sleepily
Until the stream of talk ran thin, then dry;
When buggy and barouche, chaise, gig and cart,
Received their loads and went their separate ways,
Leaving the place to holy solitude.

John Ramsay and his wife to meeting went
In sober fashion in an ancient chaise,
Driving an ancient, sober-sided horse
That napping oft and on upon the road,
Jogged steadily along and never changed
His gait accustomed, sleeping or awake;
But Cinthy and Lucinda Silas drove
In a painted cart behind a slashing bay,—
A colt he'd reared and broken to the trace.
When they returned from meeting Cinthy's beau,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Who rode a fine young gelding, went along
To dine with them, which, having done, he'd say:
"I must be going," though he never went;
But talking still of going, lingered on
Until the supper on the board was spread.
His Christian name was James—his other name?
Ah, well, it matters not,—they called him Jim.

It was a quiet and a peaceful life
Of honest labor and of honest love,—
The labor lightened by the day of rest,
When love was lifted to a higher plane.
Lucinda loved this life, it suited well
Her gentle soul; the regular routine
Of daily duties never irksome proved:
And then, when work was done and evening fell,
The welcome to her lover when he came
Home from the field, and whistling all the way
For very joy of heart. How sweet it was—
And always sweet, though every day the same—
To greet him on the threshold with a smile,
To which his lips responded with a kiss!
When Silas labored far afield, she went
To meet him in the gloaming, for she knew
He would be late; and then to walk with him,
And feel his arm about her slender waist,
His warm hand-clasp, to her was bliss indeed.
'Twas thus one evening that she went abroad
To meet her lover by the river-way.
Twilight still lingered and a crescent moon
Hung in the darkling sky, where brilliant stars
Glittered like jewels on the purple robe
Which Nature dons ere seeking her repose.
As she walked slowly, musing happily,
She heard the tramp of hoofs upon the road,
And when she turned to look behind, a horse

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Was reined up close beside her. He who rode
Leaned from his saddle, peering in her face.
"Pray, tell me," he began; then looked again,
And quickly springing from his steed he laid
His hand upon her shoulder: "Ah," he said,
"I've found you, then, at last, my lovely Pearl.
You see I know your name. Why did you leave
Without a word with me? You promised, too,
Your yea or nay to something I proposed:
Why did you fool me so, my pretty one?"
The girl was startled, but was not afraid—
Not knowing yet that he had meant her harm—
And spoke him frankly in her simple way:
"I left a message for you, sir," she said,
"With one who promised she would not forget,—
It was to say that I had found a friend——"
"A friend?" he interrupted, scornfully;
"What kind of friend is he who brought you here,
To be his servant—his poor, toiling drudge?
The woman told me you had gone away
With an old farmer fellow, and I knew
That you in ignorance had been beguiled
By some rude boor who wanted but a slave.
But come, 'tis not too late! I offered you
A pleasant home, where you should live at ease,
And servants have to do the drudgery
Which here you do for others. Come with me,
And life to you shall be a blissful dream."
"I'm happy here," was all Lucinda said.
"Happy?" he cried, and grasped her by the hand;
"What happiness can be in such estate?
You are a toiling slave, and yet you talk
Of happiness. I love you, little Pearl,
And will not leave you so." And then, ere she
Could draw her hand from his, he caught and held
Her in his arms, her sweet mouth kissing till

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

The tears of shame flowed down her burning cheeks.
She struggled wildly, and with force she freed
Herself, all quivering, from his foul caress.
Then, while she panting stood, there came a rush
Of hurrying feet, and then a blow which sent
Her rude assailant down the river's bank,
And Silas, heeding not the splash and whirl
Of rushing water when he headlong fell,
Turned with a wrathful eye upon his love.
"Oh, Silas," murmured she, and moved to cast
Herself in his embrace; but he drew back
And held her off. "Away! begone!" he cried;
"Think not that I am one to lightly take
A woman still panting from another's arms."
"What mean you, Silas?" she, affrighted, asked;
"I've done no wrong that you should scorn me so."
"Had I not seen it with my own hot eyes—
Hot with the tears that made me less a man—
Not mine own father, though I know his lips
Were never yet polluted by a lie,
Had made me doubt you; but what I have seen
I must believe, though I would gladly think
It was some hideous dream—Nay, not a word!"
(When she essayed to speak) "I know the truth,
And lies will not avail."

"O, God," she cried,
"May I not speak to justify myself?"
But hardly could she utter these few words—
The heart that leaped toward him with a gush
Of love most holy, choked by the turning flood
That he drove back.

"Fool, fool that I have been,
To trust the daughter of a woman frail,—
I might have known, had I been less a fool,
That like the parent, so the child would prove."
Thus Silas, as he turned and caught the horse,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

That missing not its master, quietly
Cropped the young grass that grew beside the road,
And leaped upon its back. Lucinda, roused,
Clasped her weak arms about the creature's neck,
And seized the bridle-rein with desperate grasp.
"Stay, stay!" she shrieked; "you have forgot the
man;
Silas, he'll drown."

"Ah, let him drown!" he said,
And struck the frightened beast a savage blow
With clenched fist, which made it rear and plunge—
Throwing the weeping girl upon the ground—
Then madly galloped off. Lucinda, stunned,
Lay where she fell upon the dusty road;
And there they found her lying late that night.

V.

"Go, seek thy home, my gentle dove,
To cage thee were a cruel deed;
Dear emblem of the Father's love,
'Twould make thy tender bosom bleed
To keep thee from thy sorrowing mate,
Who long for thee would mourning wait
Among the sighing pines.

"Woo, woo," thou criest, with none to woo;
Thy lover lorn is far away;
'Neath southern skies, with plaintive coo
He calleth thee the livelong day.
"Ah, whither, whither art thou fled?"
He sighs and mourns for thee as dead
Poor little dove,
Why didst thou rove,
To fall a prey to man's designs?

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Go, thou art freed from all control,—
Go to thy mate, for who can tell
But that some pure, sweet maiden's soul
Within thy slender form may dwell,
And then thy trembling wings to bind
Would be indeed an act unkind:
To pity my heart inclines.

Ah, how can I to thee deny
That freedom which thou lovest so well?
Away! away! sad captive fly
To where thy feathered kindred swell
The glorious song of liberty:
This beauteous world was made for thee
As well as me,
Thou meek-eyed dweller 'mong the pines.

Plying her needle, at the window sat
Lucinda, singing softly to herself.
It was the summer-time,—the still, warm air
Was full of sweetness, but she heeded not:—
There was no sweetness left in life for her.
Three long, sad years her heavy heart had borne
A fearful secret that she dared not share
With any living soul. She took the blame
Of Silas' going all upon herself,
Content to bear it patiently; she knew
That she was blameless; so it mattered not
What others thought,—in her all joy was dead,
And naught could crush her lower. So she felt,
And let them think that she had been the cause
Of this, their first great grief. She would have
gone
Back to the old life, with its sordid cares;
But Silas sent some lines, in which he begged
The mother that he loved to keep her safe

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

From every harm. He seemed to have a fear
That they might send her off, or let her go
Away from them, as she might like to do.
He wrote no word complainingly of her,—
Let them believe it was a simple case
Of unrequitted love; perhaps in time
The wound might heal, and then he would return.
And so she stayed, although 'twas hard to bear
The mother's eye, which seemed always to say
"Through you I've lost my son." And Cinthy, too,—
Who looked with scorn on poor Lucinda Pearl—
She could not understand it. Silas seemed
To her most worthy of a maiden's love,
And that this girl—this kinless, friendless waif—
Should hers from him withhold was truly strange.
But Cinthy was wedded ere a year rolled round,
And she and Jim set up their separate home,—
A happy pair as e'er together walked
The rugged ways of life. Indeed her Jim
Was a true-hearted fellow; never word
Except in kindest sympathy he spoke
To that unhappy maid: she could have kissed
The hand that took her own when none were by,—
The lips that spoke to her in gentle tones,
While bidding her take comfort. "See," he said;
"The boy was mad, but back he's sure to come;
And then betwixt ye, ye can make it straight—
The ugly turn that did upset the shay."
Thus he consoled her in his homely way,—
For he would not believe she had denied
The suit of love,—and she, though silent still,
Was grateful for the words in kindness meant.

To her now fell a double share of toil,
But she was thankful for it. It was rest
To the weary spirit. "Work, O blessed work!"

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

She oft would say: "without this work I think
That I should surely die." She even went
Out to the field to help the good old man,
Who never yet had said an unkind word,
Or cast reproachful look. "Through me," she said,
"He lost his son, and I must fill his place
As best I may." She had grown thin and pale,
As she had been in those hard days of old:
She drooped and pined, although she was not ill.
A burden of secret tragedy that seemed
To crush her down had fallen on her soul.
When twilight shadows flittered through the land,
She'd go to that dread spot, and there she'd crouch
And hug that secret to her quaking heart.
The place a ghastly fascination had
That seemed to draw her there. She'd think of him,
Her lover lost and wandering in the world,
With bitter tears; and then of him who died,—
For he was drowned: his body had been found
Far down the stream—his horse, twenty miles away;
And none had guessed the truth, but all believed
The horse had thrown the rider in the flood.

She took the house-dog with her when she went,
And he would lie and moan until she thought
She should go raving mad, when, hastening home,
Through fear and darkness, she would seek her
 room,
And pray and weep, and weep and pray until
Her heart's wild throbbing ceased; and then she'd lie
Upon her bed quite still, the brown, sad eyes
Wide open, staring, like the staring eyes
Of one who dies without a friendly hand
To close the sightless orbs when all is done.



Then leaning on the window sill she looked with eyes for seeing



The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Lucinda was singing: it was something strange,—
She wondered at herself. For many days
Her voice had scarce been heard; but now she sang,
Though mournful as the turtle's note was hers.
The sun was drifting low, his slanting beams
Flecked the green leaves of columbine that hung
About the window-frame with gorgeous tints
Of red and gold, and glancing in the room,
Touching her finger-tips, her soft, brown hair,
Her pallid cheeks and chin, transfigured her.
Then leaning on the window-sill she looked
With eyes far-seeing through the distant maze,
Until the sun went down beyond the hills,
And shadows, stealing out from bosk and brake,
Crept o'er the land; and then that longing came
Into her heart. With trembling hand she drew
Her shawl about her, and with trembling steps
She moved. Dismayed, reluctant, still she lacked
Strength to resist the spell. Ah! go she must—
Though her soul quaked within her, go she must—
The living and the dead both bade her come.
She called the dog, and he, though seeming loath,
Followed with slouching footsteps. As she walked
Beside the stream she heard its murmuring flow,
And fancied it the voice of him who died,
Accusing her. She hurried on and on,
And shut her ears to keep that sad sound out;
But still she heard it making its complaint.
At last she reached the place, and feebly fell
Upon the spot where he, the living man,
Had left her lying—oh, so long ago!
And over her the dog stood still and whined,
Until the moon arose, when he began
A howl most piteous, which a solemn owl
With mournful hootings answered from afar.
At last the beast its howling ceased, and growled,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Then gave a smothered bark. Lucinda raised
Herself upon her hands, looked down the road
And listened nervously: the watchful dog
Sat on his haunches silent, but his ears
Were pricked as though to catch some faint, far
sound;

His eyes, as on some object that he knew,
Had life and motion, fixed with steadfast gaze.
The moon just risen shed a dim, dull light,
Through which a shadow, slowly gliding, moved,
Then nearer came: a man with pack and staff,
Walking with halting steps, and stopping oft.
The dog gave one sharp yelp and bounded off;
The girl, half-rising, seemed transfixed with fear;
She saw the creature gambol with delight,
She heard it bark a quick and joyous bark;
And then she, kneeling, waited till her eyes
Uplifted saw the face which she so long
Had prayed to see again. With pleading hands
Outstretched to him, she called upon his name,
When, leaning on his staff, he blankly stared,
But spoke no word. The dog crept close to her,
And licked the hands so pleadingly upheld;
Then to his new-found lord returning, looked
Up in his face and whined; and *he* at last
His silence broke,—his tone was hard and cold:
“You here?” he said. “And so through all these
years

You have come nightly to bewail your dead,
The lover that I killed. Nay, do not speak!
Yes, with this guilty hand I struck him down,—
The blow would not have killed him, that I know;
But you know how it happened: had I not
Been maddened by my grief at finding you—
The only woman that I ever loved—
Wrapped in his arms and giving kiss for kiss,



"Silas! O, Silas! you have done me wrong."



The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

I might have saved him from his dreadful doom.
Hush, hush! you shall not speak. When I am done
Then you may tell your tale, whate'er it is."
(And so she, weeping, waited patiently.)
"I know I should have gone away and left
You two in peace. What right had I to slay,
Or even strike the man, because to me
You had proved false? It was no fault of his,
It was a cruel deed, but I was mad.
I heard that he was drowned, and I rejoiced,—
Rejoiced that you would never see him more;
But when in time my heated brain grew cool
I understood the thing that I had done.
Since then my eyes have seen the crimson stain
Of blood upon this hand, and I have known
No day of rest; and so I have come back
To own my guilt, and suffer as the law
For such a deed provides. Now speak, I'll hear
What you have got to say—I've sometimes wished
That I had been less rash that rueful night;
That I had listened to you then, though I
Had not believed your words."

Lucinda's heart

Was beating with a wild, tumultuous woe,
Her sunken eyes were weeping grievous tears;
She stood upon her feet, but swayed and shook
Like a slim sapling by a whirlwind tossed;
She scarce had strength to speak, yet speak she must.
"Silas! O Silas! you have done me wrong—
Through all these years you've done me grievous
wrong.

I ne'er loved man but you. How dearly loved
You were and are, in spite of all that's gone,
God and my heart can tell. I never kissed
The lips of man, save yours—shake not your head!
It is the truth I speak, though you may doubt,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

As God, I hope, loves me, so I love you."
"How was it then I found you in his arms,
His kisses falling hot upon your lips!
Can you deny I saw it with these eyes?
For, if you can, what then must I believe?—
That all the past is but a woeful dream,
And we are dreaming still? Ah, would we were!"
"Silas," she said, do you remember once
You came upon me in the dark, and caught
Me in your arms and kissed me till I cried,
Thinking some stranger rude thus me assailed?"
"Remember? Yes, do I remember well;
And how I laughed! ah me! I could laugh then.
But what has that to do with him?"—he paused:
Through the black cloud that had obscured his mind
There broke a gleam of light. "O God!" he cried;
"O God! if this be true! If this be true!"
"It is most true," she said, "as I have faith
That I shall see the Lord when life is done,—
It is most true. That poor dead man did take
Me unawares, ere I had thought that he
Had such intent; and kissed me, as you saw.
I kissed not him; my heart was sick with shame—
I loathed myself and him; I could have died
To cleanse me from the stain!"

With one great groan
The wretched man fell on his knees and wept.
"O madman, reckless madman that I've been!"
He cried, his voice all broken up with sobs;
"Leave me, Lucinda Pearl—it were a shame
That with a felon you should commerce hold:
I am a guilty wretch, and needs must go
To them whose duty 'tis to punish guilt."
But she knelt down beside him in the dust,
And clasped him fondly in her loving arms,
Kissing his tears away while shedding tears.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

"No, Silas, no, I will not go," she said;
"You are my own—the all I have on earth,
For whom I've wept and prayed these three sad years.
Why should you tell the thing that you have done?
Why should you suffer for a deed not meant—
A mishap that befell?—for such it was.
O love, dear love! what guilt with you can lie?
You struck a blow—it was a righteous blow,
Which he deserved—you did not mean to kill
The man who wronged you—he did wrong you, dear,
And you were justly wroth." Thus did she plead
With subtle sophistry as love alone
Dare plead to win his cause; and he with whom
She pleaded listened, half-inclined to doubt
That still, small voice within him which accused
And would not be appeased. He answered not,
But hand in hand they from their knees arose,
Turning their faces homeward through the gloom.

The trial was over; Silas Ramsay stood,
A man condemned; but uttered no complaint—
Three years' imprisonment the law's award
For one short moment of unruly wrath.
"A sentence light," thought he, and was content.
The fond, old mother, weeping bitterly,
Clung to her boy. His grey head humbly bowed,
The father stood; Lucinda close at hand,
Downcast and dumb, with burning, tearless eyes;
And honest Jim, whose wife was kept at home
By a sick babe.

"O Mother! Mother dear!"

The young man cried, his voice half-choked with
tears;

"Let not my sin your heart consume with grief:
I am no coward, and I'd meet my fate
As should a man, though harder yet it were.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

When one hath done a wrong, it is but right
That he should suffer—'tis a debt he owes.
When I've paid mine, to you I will return
A better son, and freed from this great guilt,
For which I now must render my account
To God and man. I know I could have 'scaped
Man's vengeance, had I chosen so to do;
But my unhappy soul gave me no rest—
And life were ceaseless torment with the weight
Of secret guilt to carry to the end.
Come, my Lucinda. Mother, here is one
Will be your comforter when I am gone:
Three grievous years this brave and noble soul
Hath borne another's burden as her own;
And e'en were I content to carry still
A stricken conscience through a shameful life,
I could not longer suffer her to share
The dreadful load that would o'erwhelm us both.
Take her to heart, dear Mother; she hath proved
A daughter worthy of your trust and love.
From her, alas! how long I've wandered far,
With wilful madness to her virtues blind;
Now vengeful fate compels me hence again
When I would gladly stay. Forgive me, love,
If my chastisement fall with equal force
Upon your sinless soul. 'Tis only right
That I should reap wrath's harvest, but that you,
Dear innocent, must feel the weighty hand
Of outraged law doth seem indeed, most hard:
Yet thus it is that we who sin will drag
Our dearest down to our own depths of woe.
Farewell, good Father. Pardon me, the son
Who sorrow brings to your declining days:
Mother, farewell; and you, Lucinda Pearl;
And honest Jim—kiss Cinthy and the babes
For me, old friend; and keep in good heart all—

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Think I am gone a journey, whence in time
I shall return a better, happier man—
O Christ! my Saviour God! what great amends
Must I now make to Thee and these beloved?"

* * * *

And so he left them with a word of cheer,
Lest they should know the truth: his manly heart
Was well-nigh breaking for the wreck he'd wrought.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

THE PENANCE OF SILAS RAMSAY.

Strange faces, hard faces, scarred with vicious lines,
With here and there a face that hath the look
Of innocence—a smiling, pleasant face;
But man may smile and be a very rogue,
The Avon bard hath said, and so it is.
And there were faces dark, with shaggy brows,
That hung o'er cunning eyes whose furtive looks,
Like creatures of the night, did steal abroad,
Retreating quickly at the least alarm
Under the shadows of the hanging brows.
Half shaven heads that looked as they had been
Hard mauled and battered out of human form;
Curious low foreheads, flat and meaningless,
With big, unshapely ears, and wide, deep mouths,
Armed with sharp fangs. A fearful company
Of silent men, who delved from morn till night,
Under their keeper's ever-watchful eyes.
About these men a something fiendish was,
Something of Hell about their dwelling place.
Sombre, tho' full of clashing, clanging noise,
The noise of industry that never ceased,
Until the sun went down, and darkness clasped
The gloomy walls within it's wide embrace.
Here, to this hell—it was a hell to him—
Silas was brought. Scarce conscious was he when
The iron portals closed and shut him in.
His name was written in the prison books,
As we might write the name of one who dies;
And thenceforth was he but a nameless thing,



He prayed as he had never prayed before.



The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Like a beast branded—by a number known.
Like one who walketh in his sleep, he moved
Betwixt two keepers, gloomy-eyed and grim,
Who led him here and there without a word,
As tho' he were some creature reasonless.
But when they clothed him in the prison garb,
And clipt away his yellow curling hair,
His poor, bewildered spirit was aroused:
He uttered one long, wailing cry, and wept
As weeps the man who feels his heart will break—
His very soul will die. They left him there
Locked in a cell alone. Nay, not alone;
For fancy peopled all the stifling air
With horrid, mocking fiends, who, grinning, claimed
His brotherhood. O, infamy! O, shame!
Dog-like he groveled on the floor and groaned,
And tears of fire shed: they seemed to burn
The flesh they touched. This degradation deep
Was like a frightful pit, as black as night,
In which he had fallen, and from whence appeared
No way of exit. Long he lay, and moaned,
And wept and sighed, and then he humbly crawled
Upon his knees, and called, beseeching God,
Not to deliver him from present thrall—
He knew 'twas needful for his spirit's rest,
That he should penance do—but that he might
Have strength to bear the burden manfully.
He prayed as he had never prayed before
To that dear Lord who seemed so far away;
Beseeching, pleading, till He nearer drew,
And lifted from his soul that great despair,
Which had o'ermastered him; and then he slept,
And God's peace rested on him while he slept.
At dawn of day—tho' in his narrow cell
The night still lingered—they came and led him forth
Unto a life that seemed a living death,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

And like Lucinda, when despair had crushed
Her gentle soul and blighted all her life,
He was most thankful for the boon of work.
As she had thought, thought he, "Without the work
I feel that I should die." And so he worked
As tho his life depended on the task.
His fellow prisoners wondered why he toiled
So willingly at that which they would shirk,
Not knowing that for him salvation lay
In common labor that would numb the brain.
He was unskilled, but soon with practice came
Craft-cunning, and the hand that erstwhile drove
The plow unerringly in furrows straight,
Upturning to the sun the fruitful glebe;
Tamed the wild colt, or laid the sturdy oak
On mother earth, and split it into rails:
Became expert with needles, thread and awls;
With pincers, punches, scissors, and the like.
All the long day he wrought unceasingly;
For then he kept aloof the maddening thoughts
Of joys that he had lost, and vain regrets.
And when black night came down, and labor ceased,
Rejoicing he heard the door that, clanging, shut
Him in his cell, and out that company
Of crime—cursed men with whom his lot was cast.
He knelt and prayed to Him who giveth sleep
To his beloved, and his spirit passed
Beyond those walls accursed, where slumber-wrapped
His body lay, and lived with them he loved.

Near his allotted place a convict worked
Who seemed to take his lot contentedly;
A smiling face he had, as merry thoughts
His fancy tickled and awoke his mirth.
He would have sung, but that the prison rules
Bade him be dumb; so he could only look

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

The music that was in him, while he tapped
A rhythmic cadence with the tools he used.
He seemed misplaced among that hardened crew,
Whose wicked faces stamped were with a scowl,
The brooding shadow of their evil lives,
The outward impress of the soul within.
This man a swift glance oft at him would cast,
And if no warden's eye were on him, tip
A little nod, as tho' to say "Cheer up,
Cheer up, and laugh at Fate, despite her frowns,
And with you she will laugh and change her mood."
And sooth 'tis so. When Fate doth throw a man
If he rise not, and show a valiant front,
Then is he lost; for Fate no mercy hath—
Naught but contempt for coward heart that lies
Licking the dust with sighs and whining plaints;
But for the man who fights in spite of all
The ills she heaps upon him, she hath oft
A prize worth winning, tho' she grudging gives.
Strict silence was the rule, but signs there were
With which these social pariahs filled the void
Of speech forbidden. Silas these soon learned.
How? Scarce could he tell; and little need had he
For such poor knowledge, being mostly wrapped
In melancholy thought. But times with him—
That friendly neighbor—he'd exchange a sign
Of recognition—nothing more; he feared
To rouse the warden's ire, for he had seen
Men cruelly used for very petty faults,
Subjected to debasing punishments,
Which would have broken heart and spirit both
Of him, had he the wretched victim been.
He'd ne'er provoke the wrath of savage men,
Who had the power to use him shamefully,
For spite or malice, as the devils do.
One day his friend—he had begun to feel

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

This merry comrade in some sort a friend—
With such signs asked what his offense had been.
He answered not at once. Alas! he felt
That with a sign he could not fully tell
The story of his guilt, the cause and all
That might be said to palliate the act,
To smooth the brutal fact, and make it seem
Less brutal than it was. At last he made
A quick response which told the plain, bare truth.
“Murder,” the other said, and looked aghast.
The word was uttered in a hushed, scared tone,
The speaker seeming in the shocked surprise
At this confession to forget the rules
That bade his tongue be dumb. ’Twas plain that he
Had looked not for an answer such as this,
From one whose gentle melancholy mien
Had touched his sympathy. Some petty crime,
The issue of circumstance, he thought, perchance,
Had snared him in the meshes of the law.
The blood of man he ne’er himself had shed,
Tho’ his had been a wild and reckless life
Of sin and crime; and now it startled him
That one so young should do so foul a deed.
Silas saw how it stood, how he had shocked
This man who was a criminal himself,
And half regretted having told the truth:
But speak the truth he must, whatever came.
Tho’ in his passion he had done the deed,
The most abhorred of all that man can do,
His manly, honest nature turned with scorn
From falsehood’s cowardice; tho’ he had killed
The man, he would not lie; that “vice of slaves,”
Lying, he loathed. ’Twas that had brought him back
To face his doom; for he had lived a life
He knew was false until he loathed himself.
And so, self-loathing to himself became

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

A thing most hateful. Better far to die
Than still to live and be a living lie.
The word his comrade spake was harsh and hard;
Cruelly cold, but coldly truthful too.
It told the tale with sudden emphasis,
That could not be gainsaid; tho' legal phrase
Might twist its meaning, making it appear
As something else, it stood out clear and sharp,
In letter red that technicality
Could never hide beneath its threadbare garb
Of forms contorted and contorted speech.
In mood more sombre now the poor youth moved.
He thought the knowledge of his monstrous crime
Had quenched the friendly spirit of the man,
Who shrank from him as from some creature loathed.
'Twas but a fancy, yet the fancy oft
Beguiles us to believe the very worst;
And while he thought his pleasant neighbor had
To him unfriendly grown, the neighbor made
Excuse for him, believing in his soul
Some provocation great had urged and forced
Him to the desperate act. Such things have been.
Men of the mildest natures have been known
To take a sudden vengeance on the foes
Who sought to tramp them down into the dust.
And love, the gentlest sense that moves the heart,
Will sometimes rave, by jealous fancies turned
Into a madness that will drive the man
To do mad deeds. And Silas worked and thought,
"Once more am I alone; all men who know
What I have done turn from me with a dread:
A man proscribed I'll be unto the end."

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

II

The cold, white snow was falling thick and fast;
Whirled by the whirling winds, the flying flakes
On hill and valley settled silently,
Covering the land as with the vail of death,
Hiding from living eyes the stark, still dead;
High loading cottage roof and leafless tree,
Bending the cracking limbs beneath the weight;
Piling in drifts where hidden fences stood;
Levelling the hillocks, hiding road and path.
All day they floated on thin, noiseless wings,
But when the night drew near they slacked, then
ceased.

A great white peace reigned o'er a buried world.
Lucinda near the casement stood and looked
Abroad upon the scene and thought of him,
Shut in his prison cell. A little while—
Ah, yet a little while and he'd be free—
His penance made. Once more the world must rise
From this cold death, in beauty bloom again,
Breathing life's fragrant breath, and joyous sing
Triumphant nature's resurrection hymn;
Then the long winter of her soul would end,
Love's summer warm to life her grief crushed heart.
With cheering glow the crackling fire burned,
Filling the room with warmth and ruddy light,
And by the hearthstone mother Ramsay sat,
Knitting wool stockings for her goodman, John;
Her needles flashing like electric sparks,
The firelight glowing on the snow-white head,
And on the patient face, where sorrow's hand
Had writ it's grievous tale. The while she worked
A smile of joy broke through the cloud of woe,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

As from a dismal sky will sometimes burst
A sunny gleam to cheer desponding man:
And then the hands grew still and idle lay
Upon her lap, while she gazed musingly
Into the red fire's heart. Lucinda came
And knelt beside her. Mother dear," she said,
And took the withered hand within her own,
"What see you there to set your face alight
With such great joy?"

"Ah, love, I see my boy,"

The mother said, with hushed and quavering voice,
"I see his handsome face, his honest eye,
That never shrank before another's gaze—
Not even when he stood before the judge,
By his own words condemned. Ah, me! Ah, me!
How long I've waited, Lord; but now the end
Is drawing nigh and he to me will come.
When the birds sing again I'll see his face,
And hold him in these arms, as when a babe,
He lay upon my breast. Ah, me! Ah, me!
And then my heart will sing as sing the birds,
And the old blood in me will dance with joy—
With such great joy as I have never known,
Not even on the day when I was wed."
The mother stroked with loving touch the hand
That clasped her own, and stroked the soft brown
hair.

"Poor, little heart," she said, as she had said
So many years ago, "Poor, little heart,
It, too, has suffered, waiting patiently,
Thro' the long night that was so dreary dark,
For the bright morn that seemed so far away,
Complaining not. Dear heart, so brave and true,
It shall with love be made content at last.
It seemeth strange to us, poor mortals blind,
That tho' we strive the blessed Lord to please,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Our souls with dreadful agony are torn
Just when we think our happiness complete.
Ah, hap it may be that our hearts are proud,
And through the darkness of self-righteousness
We cannot see how weak and vain we are.
Yes, I was proud of him, my noble boy,
In whom I saw no fault, my judgment warpt
By mother love. But I am humbled now,
And Lord, dear Lord, bring comfort ere I die.
Thou gavest me my son and warmed my heart
With that great love which has my weakness proved:
And Thou wilt not withhold Thy peace at last."
Then faintly rose from those old lips a hymn,
With trembling notes, uncertain of the way;
Now running over with the soul's excess,
Then going back, repeating word or line,
When failing memory faltered o'er the tune.

I

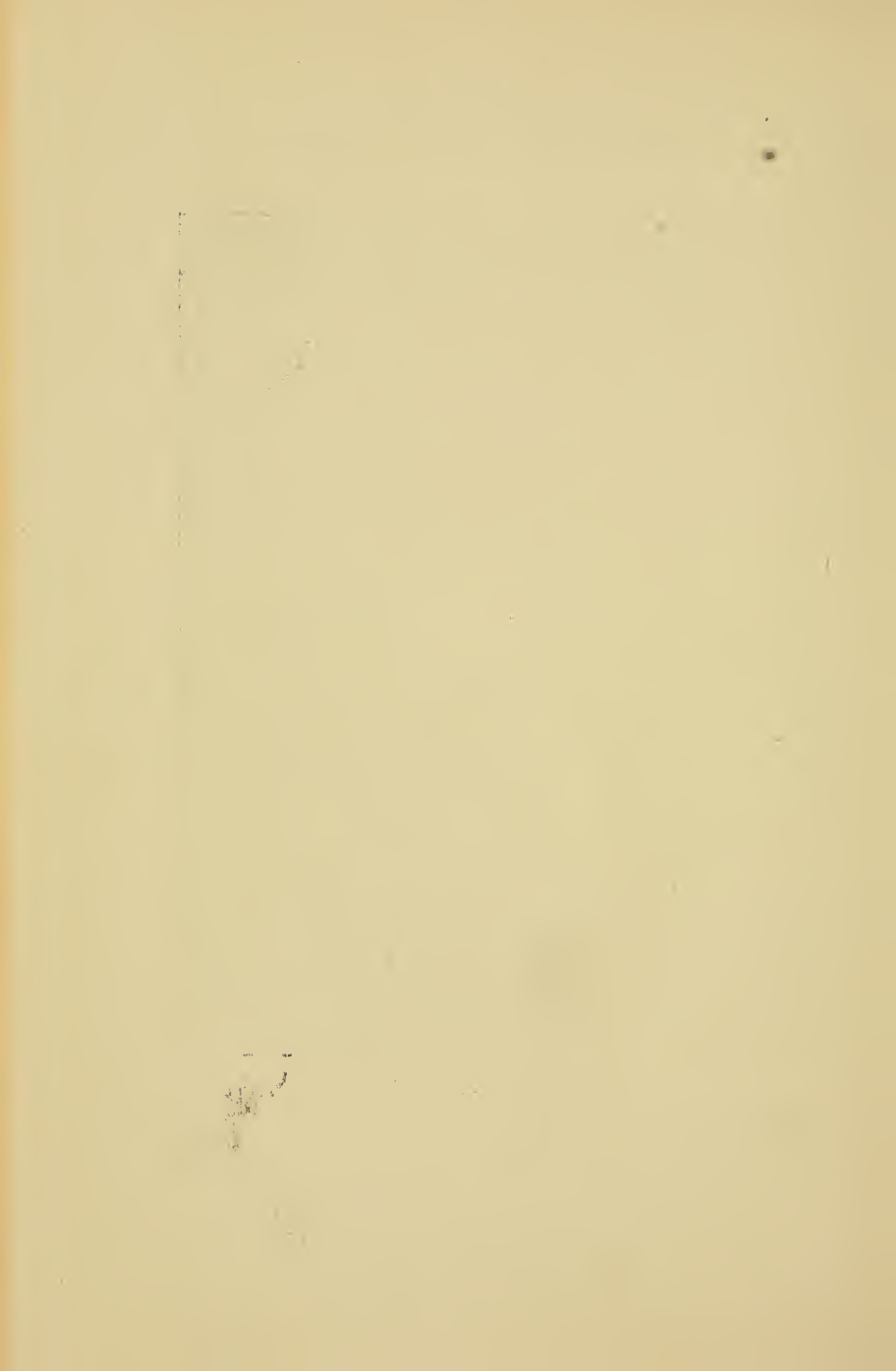
O Lord, Thy will be done,
Whate'er that will may be;
For Thou and Thy dear Son
Know what is best for me.
My heart with pride is full,
And I thy pardon crave;
For Thou dost crush out pride,
Our wretched souls to save.

II

Dear Lord! 'twere vain for me
To Thee my grief to tell;
For Thou dost all things see,
And all things know as well.
Tho' o'er this poor, weak head
The bitter waters roll,
And tho' Thou griev'st me sore,
I know Thou lov'st my soul.



"O, Lord, Thy will be done."



The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

III

Yes, tho' by sorrows torn,
My faith will still prevail,
And when the end shall come
Thy love will not me fail.
I'll trust to that great love,
Tho' racked with agony,
For from Thy throne above
Thou know'st what's best for me.

Lucinda said no word, but bowed her head
Upon the trembling knee, and from her eyes
Tears flowed unseen by her for whom she wept.
Such faith to her was yet a mystery.

III

The land is drenched and drowned, the rains have beat
The tender new sprung leaves and catkins down,
And strewn them on the soft and soppy mold,
Mingled with sear, brown leaves that autumn winds
Stript from the trees and scattered everywhere.
The river's brim is torn by angry waves,
That leap and roar like savage beasts: the stream
That erstwhile peaceful, flowed thro' valleys green,
A raging yellow torrent has become,
Within whose bosom nature looks askant,
With sallow face, her beauty all despoiled:
And rivulets to rivers grown, spread out
O'er meadow land and field, and bring to naught
The labor of the husbandman, who drives
His hungry cattle high up on the hills,
Where scanty herbage tempts their appetites.
The first spring flowers droop their heavy heads,
Pallid and limp, sick unto death. Too soon
They ventured forth, their silken petals oped,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Like infants' wondering eyes; their golden hearts,
That held enticement for the buzzing host,
Were rudely shattered, wasted all their wealth,
Whose odors linger yet in humid air,
As spirits loath to leave their ruined homes.
And birds which filled the vale with joyous song,
To hail Earth's Easter morn, now sad and mute,
Sit in the melancholy groves, with eyes
Upgazing at the clouds, whose bellies black,
And big to bursting, threaten with fresh floods
The ruin to complete that they began.

* * * *

"The downpour slackens, comrade, let's begone.
The bridge is washed away, but chance we'll find
Some little craft, and if the skill were mine
In other years, e'er yet my days were curst,
Hold good, 'twill bear us safely o'er the flood."
'Twas Silas spoke, his comrade was the man,
His fellow prisoner with the friendly smile.

"On yonder side, not far from here, the farm
Lies in a quiet nook. There we may rest,
And seek forgetfulness of evil times:
There the dear mother waits for us, and she
Will teach you what it is to have a home—
A thing, you say, you never yet have known."

"Ay true it is. Since when I was a child
I've been adrift and knocking 'bout the world,
An empty ship that sailed the sea of life,
Without a pilot and without a port."

"Well, you must know, such ships are doomed to
wreck;
Destruction's rocks lie ever in their way,
And soon or late they strike; then comes the end.
Now here's a port for you, good friend, at last,
If you will anchor."

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

"Yes, ah yes, perhaps.

But I'm so little used to decent folk,
I know not how they'll take me; I have swum
So long in vice's current that I fear
The prison's in my very blood; my soul—
I know not if I have one, but if so
'Tis smothered deep beneath its load of sin;
So foul it is with evil tendencies,
I fear not long in virtue's way I'll bide.
Ah me, my friend, you did one ugly thing"—
"Nay, say not so. Use not such gentle phrase,
To name my fault. It was a horrid deed—
A damned and dreadful crime."

"Well, be it so.

But still, 'twas done in passion, while with me
'Tis otherwise. I've always evil done
For evil's sake. My crimes, you say, are small;
But then the sum is great, o'ertopping far
The one mad act that stands to your account."
"Not so, not so. But since you will insist,
Then let the matter rest. We'll say no more.
And why should you not break the bonds that hold
You in this evil way?"

"That's said with ease,

But let me tell you this which I have learned:
When once the devil takes a man in tow,
A man that's willing, loving devil's work,
He finds it hard to break the grappling hooks,
Altho' he knows they drag him down to hell."
They found a boat—a little crazy craft,
That had been hauled above the waters' reach,
Which easily they launched, and leaped within.
Silas stood in the stern with paddle poised,
Midships his comrade squatted, holding fast
With nervous hands, and looking straight ahead.
The fragile bark shot out upon the stream,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

Impelled by youthful vigor practice taught
To steer with skill, to check, to swerve aside
When perils unlooked for threatened sudden wreck.
The waters swirled and strove with wild turmoil
To drive it onward on its own mad rush;
But Silas knew to make the current swift
His slave instead of master, and they passed
With safety almost to the further shore,
Tho' drifting somewhat. Silas looking up,
Beheld Lucinda running down the road,
Her hair, all loosened, flying in the wind,
Her hand uplifted, waving something white,
A welcome signal. "See, she comes," he cried.
E'en while he spoke there was a dreadful shock—
A whirl—a plunge, and then the waters rolled
Above his head. When he arose he sought
With anxious eye his friend, who, struggling, burst
Gasping and strangling from the tawny depths;
Clutching the air, as drowning men are wont.
A swimmer bold was Silas; striking out,
He caught the man and held him while he strove
To gain the land; but, O, the river strong
Was as some greedy monster, full of wrath,
That held them fast, and dragged them down to death.
The loving girl, whose heart had leaped with joy,
Was seized with sudden fright. She nought could do:
Not even could she cry, tho' rage to scream,
To shout aloud, was tearing at her breast.
As one who sleeps and dreams some awful dream
Would cry for help, but utters not a sound,
An inward battle raging, while the limbs
And tongue, rebellious 'gainst the will's commands,
Refuse to stir, she helpless stood and gazed.

Tho' we be brave we fight with all our might
To fend off death, for life to us is sweet.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

To life we cling when oft 'twere best to die,
And 'scape the load of ills that weighs us down.
E'en tottering age, which plainly can discern
The point of vanishing, so close at hand,
As lusty youth that hope doth beckon on,
Is loath to reach the goal where all must be
Restored at last to vast infinity.
A tree upturned, still rooted to the soil,
From which it sprung, swung swaying o'er the
stream,
That fiercely strove to tear it from its hold:
A desperate chance, but Silas struggling drew
His helpless burden to it. Clinging fast
To the strong boughs, he slippery footing won,
And then Lucinda came, with feeble aid,
And they the stranger laid upon the bank,
Half in this rugged world and half beyond.

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The home is joyful now with that sweet joy
Which from the eye shines out on them we love:
The ardent look with which the spirit speaks
From the pure depths where burns love's sacred flame.
Lucinda and Silas scarcely ever spoke,
Of that which moved their hearts with happy thrills,
But hand in hand sat silent side by side;
Or walked enlocked, as they had walked of old,
Thro' woods and meadows, never by the stream.
Once only did they speak of him, the youth
Who perished for his folly. Silas called
His image up. "Oh, God," he, groaning, said,
"That I could but forget the one great wrong!
It is a heavy burden on my soul,
And I must bear it always while I live,
Tho' with a contrite heart I've penance done."
"Let not such thoughts embitter life," she said:

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

"Thro' Christ, our Lord, forgiven is your sin;
And for him lost another has been found."

"No, no, not so; he'll ne'er again be well;
We see him growing weaker day by day:
The water's chill embrace still holds him fast:
He 'scaped the sudden death to slowly die."
"His body, yes; but we his soul will save,
Which is more worth our care."

Poor wreck of man—
Yes, wrecked at last, but on a friendly shore,
With loving hearts to feed the hungry soul.
They talked to him of things beyond this life,
"Christ died to save all sinners. Thus it is;
If we believe, howe'er defiled by sin,
We grow in grace until our souls are fit
To live with Him, our Lord, who on the Cross
For us was sacrificed." They told him this.
"But is that all?" he asked. "'Tis all: God's word.
If 'twere not so, what hope had any man?"
And he believed, and felt that blessed peace
Which comes to all who give themselves to Christ;
So laid him down to rest in sweet content.

THE END.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

THE CITY OF DEATH.

I travelled in an eastern land,
Of forests drear and lone;
Thro' reeking swamp, o'er burning sand,
Where sad winds wail and moan.

No mortal spake a word to me,
But creatures wild I saw;
The tiger roaming fierce and free,
With bloody lip and claw.

The savage bear, the jackal foul,
And crafty wolf crept near;
The things that all night shriek and howl,
And fill the soul with fear.

And wriggling serpents there I met,
With poisonous fang and breath;
Things that my faltering steps beset,
Whose lightest touch means death.

I found a city lying fair
Upon a sunny slope;
And from my soul went out despair,
And in its stead came hope.

I entered in, but what a sight
Met my abhorrent eyes;
Great flocks of filthy birds took flight,
With hoarse and sullen cries.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

And lying here and lying there,
Were ghastly heaps of dead;
Men, women, children everywhere:
Life from that town had fled.

No living man or woman bade
Me welcome to the place;
No little child obeisance made,
And wished to me God's grace.

I made my way with shrinking feet,
The dead lay still and stark;
And off the narrow crooked street
I heard the wild dogs bark.

Within the houses dismal black,
I saw the slinking beast;
And as I passed the birds came back,
Returning to the feast.

The dreadful birds, the birds of woe,
They danced around in rings,
Tripping on light fantastic toe,
With outspread sable wings.

And creeping, crawling things were there
To share the horrid food;
But from the flesh that they did tear
Came not a drop of blood.

O, dear Lord Christ! those glistening teeth,
Those staring, sightless eyes;
The unclean things that stirred beneath,
And, O! the swarms of flies.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

The buzzing flies, the droning flies,
That settled on the dead;
Would with a sudden whirl arise,
At my advancing tread.

And, O! the putrid, stinking air,
The rotting flesh, the bones:
My soul was faint with new despair,
My heart was rent with groans.

It was an awful thing, ah me;
A thing the soul to rack;
To pass by Death, with Death to be,
To follow in his track.

These were the vassals of a lord,
Who lived in grand estate;
But they, poor wretches, were abhored,
By this ruler of their fate.

He took their dole of hard-earned gold,
To swell his wealth's great tide;
And to their gods their woes they told,
And laid them down and died.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

ARACHNE.

I

Ah, she was beautiful standing there,
Twisting and twining her beautiful hair;
Twisting and twining it,
Twining and twisting it,
Making a web of it,
A web to ensnare
The hearts of men,
To fill with despair
The souls of men.

II

Yes, she was beautiful, with beautiful eyes,
Eyes like the sapphire,
Tinged with the blue
Of darker hue
That in the lapsis-lazuli lies.
Ah, such eyes, such wonderful eyes,
That looking on man would make him unwise.

III

Twisting and twining her beautiful hair
She wove her snare,
And out of it shone her glittering eyes
Full of great joy; "Ah, men are wise,"

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

She said;
"But beauty is better than wisdom, I trow;
'Tis better than wisdom, 'tis better than love.
And what is love that we hear such plaint
From sinner and saint?
Ah, what, forsooth?
'Tis a thing for our laughter, a folly of youth;
A puff o' the wind,
A freak o' the mind
Beclouded with smoke:
'Tis a joke, ho, ho, 'tis a joke."
And so she went forth with her glittering eyes,
To dazzle the foolish and confound the wise.

IV

In the marts of trade where they buy and sell
She walked with a stately grace and pride,
And when her glance upon them fell—
The glowing glance of her sapphire eyes—
They left the sum of their gains untold,
Their yellow heaps of gleaming gold;
Their souls enthralled, their cunning lies
Died on their lips. With dumb amaze
They turned from the shrine of their mammon god,
And gathered about her where she stood,
Content to gaze
On the wondrous beauty that heeded not
Their worshipful mood.
God wot
They were naught to her, this trading crew,
And one bewildering glance she threw
Among the lot—
Pagan, Panim, Gentile and Jew—
And left them there and went her ways.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

V

She went to the courts where the judges sate,
Felons to try, and fix their fate—
The judges, whose hearts had long been dried,
Till naught was left but a turbid tide
Of sluggish blood.
She looked and their mummied hearts throbbed and
 swelled
While the blood that had welled
Like a fountain of mud,
Gave a sudden gush that filled the brain,
And leapt like a fire through every vein;
And the advocate's argument lost its thread,
For the advocate's self had lost his head,
And all of his talk seemed wild confusion,
While the jury was dazed with a strange illusion:
And the men who were tried
Could have gone their ways;
But they stood and stared as men in a maze.
So she left them all,
Under the thrall,
Under the thrall of her passing gaze.

VI

There, where the sacred sounds arise,
The solemn chant, the organ's peal,
To search the vault of the far off skies,
For Him, the universal Lord;
Where sinners kneel,
To pray and weep, to moan and sigh,

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

And send to Heaven
A piteous cry
To be forgiven—
Ah, many the evil paths they'd trod,
For love of self,
For love of pelf;
Forgetting that there is a God—
She sat and heard the holy man,
Who bade them worship Him alone
Who sitteth upon the great white throne.

VII

His thoughts flowed down in a torrent of words,
Like nuggets of gold and gems that gleam,
And flash and sparkle through the flood—
Through the hurrying flood of the mountain stream.
And he told of the One who suffered and died,
Whose precious blood
For them was shed, and loudly cried,
"Repent, ye sinners, turn, turn away
From the road to hell while yet 'tis day;
For night it cometh when no man may."

VIII

She caught the glance of his frenzied eye,
And trembling he held his panting breath,
Then heaved from his heart's deep depths a sigh,
And talked no more of sin and death,
While a web of desire around him she wove,
And wrapped him about with the meshes of love.
And when he went forth from the House of God,
Like a man in a dream the streets he trod.

The Idyll of Lucinda Pearl

IX

She followed him there and he looked behind,
Groping his way, as him who is blind;
And would have fallen, but she caught his hand,
And whispered that she would lead him aright;
For he was like one who is lost in the land
Of desolate night.
And she led him away to the halls of pleasure,
And made him trip with her a measure,
While clasping her close in a fierce embrace,
He bent his dark eyes on her face.

X

At last they danced out into the gloom—
The night was black and the moon was blue—
And the curst came forth with clattering bones,
With gnashing jaws and dreadful groans,
To join in the merry-go-round:
And they whirled and twirled with a fiendish crew.
To the owl's too-woo,
And the devil's tattoo,
They danced away to their doom.

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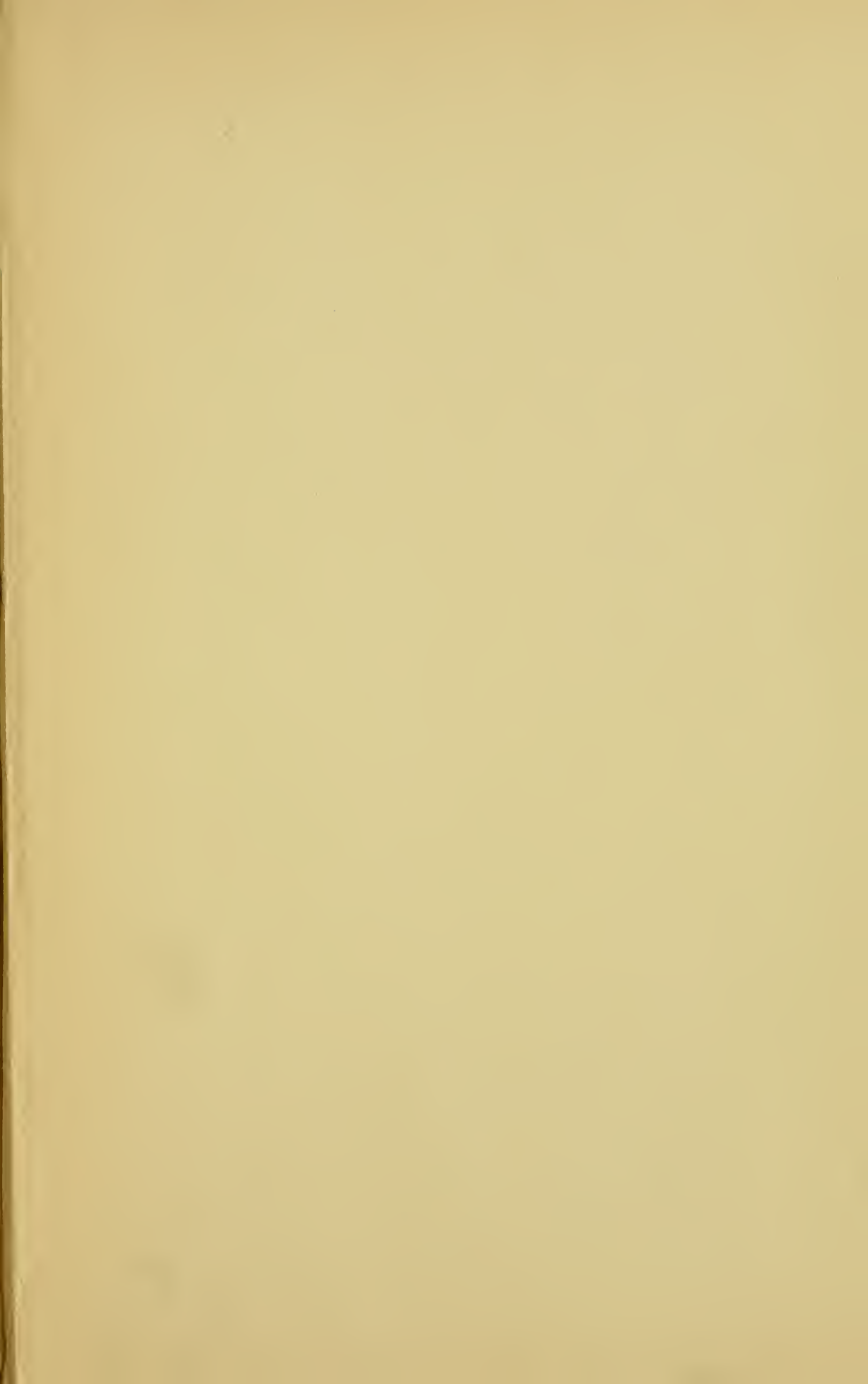
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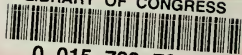
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